Don’t Rush the Wine

An Inconvenient Reflection on BHTs and the Addiction Industry

Dr. Jeffrey Hansen, PhD

A Clinical and Social Lens

There is a certain irony in what I am about to say, and I am aware of it even as I write it.

To use wine as an analogy in the context of addiction recovery feels, at first glance, almost inappropriate. For many, alcohol has been part of the very destruction we are trying to help people heal from. And yet, if we can hold that tension for a moment, there is something about the process of making good wine that speaks directly to what is missing in much of our work. So I am going to lean into the analogy, not to be clever, but because it reveals something important about how real transformation actually occurs.

Part of how I come to this is through the lens of my training. As a clinical psychologist, I was trained in abnormal psychology, which at its core asks the question of what is wrong. What is happening within the individual. Where is the breakdown in thinking, in behavior, in emotional regulation, in development. That lens matters, and it is essential to the work.

But those who know me also know that I do not stay there.

I have always been drawn to social psychology, to stepping back and gaining altitude, to asking broader questions about systems, organizations, and culture itself. Not just what is happening within the individual, but what is happening around the individual. What is it about the structures we create, the environments we build, the industries we participate in, that shape outcomes in ways we may not fully recognize.

And when I apply that lens to the addiction treatment industry, a question continues to surface.

Why is it that after fifty years, we are not meaningfully better in our outcomes?

We have more programs, more language, more modalities, more structure. And yet, when you step back and look honestly, the outcomes have not shifted in a way that reflects true advancement. That is not an accusation. It is an observation. And it is one that, I believe, requires us to look more closely, to analyze more deeply, and to be willing to ask questions that may be uncomfortable.

The Courage to Say What Is Difficult

There is also something else that comes with this work.

As psychologists, we are trained not only to observe, but at times to say what may be difficult to hear. In the therapy room, part of our responsibility is to gently but directly challenge clients in areas they may not yet be ready to look at. Not to force, not to shame, but to invite awareness where avoidance may still exist.

And that process is not without risk.

Psychotherapy, when it is done well, is not a comfortable process. It requires courage on the part of the client, but it also requires a willingness on the part of the therapist to step into that tension, to speak carefully but honestly, knowing that what is said may be received with resistance before it is received with understanding.

I have never been one to play it safe, nor one to avoid naming what I see. Not because I believe I have it all right, but because I believe we are not called to live or work out of fear.

Scripture reminds us, *"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."* (2 Timothy 1:7)

So, in that same spirit, I am aware that some of what I am about to say may feel uncomfortable. And I say it not as criticism, but as part of an ongoing commitment to think deeply about the work we are doing and the people we are entrusted to serve.

The Wisdom of the Vintner

A good vintner does not rush the process.

There is an attentiveness that borders on reverence. The soil matters, the timing matters, the fermentation must be monitored carefully, and the balance of acidity and sugar must be

watched and adjusted with precision. The environment must be right, the barrels must be right, and even the subtle shifts over time must be respected. Every stage requires presence and discernment, but perhaps most of all, it requires patience.

Because then comes the part that cannot be manufactured.

There is a waiting that must occur, not passive, but intentional. The kind of waiting that understands that time is not an obstacle to the process, but an essential ingredient in it. A good red wine can take years to fully develop into what it is meant to be. Years before its depth and complexity are truly expressed. If you drink it too early, you may still have something that resembles wine, but it will not carry what it was meant to carry. It can be thin, sharp, incomplete. In some cases, it is simply not good, and it gets poured out. That is not failure. That is discernment.

And as I sit with that, I find myself increasingly unable to ignore the parallel to what I see in the addiction treatment industry, particularly at the level of Behavioral Health Technicians.

Lived Experience and Timing

Let me be clear. I have deep respect for BHTs. I have worked alongside them and seen their heart, their commitment, and their willingness to step into very difficult spaces with people who are suffering. You do not choose that kind of work unless something in you is oriented toward care.

But respect does not mean we stop asking hard questions about the system we are placing them into.

Because what I often observe is this. We are bringing individuals into these roles who have genuine desire and often lived experience, and in many cases, that lived experience includes their own journey out of addiction. In truth, many, and often most, BHTs come into this field with a personal history of addiction and recovery.

That is not a liability.

In many ways, it is one of the greatest strengths this field has. It brings empathy, credibility, and a depth of understanding that cannot be taught in a classroom.

But like anything of real value, it requires time to mature.

The movement from early recovery into stable, integrated living is not instantaneous. It is a process of rebuilding character, restoring values, and learning to live in a way that is consistent over time. And when that process is still unfolding, placing someone into a role that requires them to help others navigate it can create a level of strain that neither they nor the system are fully prepared to carry.

Addiction does not simply disrupt behavior. It dismantles structure. It erodes character. It distorts values. It fragments identity. Recovery, if it is to be meaningful, is not just

abstinence. It is reconstruction. It is the slow rebuilding of a life from the inside out, and that rebuilding takes time in ways that cannot be compressed or bypassed.

Scripture speaks to this reality with remarkable clarity. *"Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope."* (Romans 5:3–4)

That progression matters. Character is not immediate. It is formed, layer by layer, through time, pressure, and lived experience. It is, in many ways, the aging of the soul.

A Word to Leaders

Writing

And yet, in many treatment environments, we find ourselves doing something quite different.

We take good people, often still early in their own rebuilding, and we place them into roles that require them to help others rebuild. What emerges is not a failure of heart, but a mismatch of timing. The desire to help is real, and the intention is often deeply sincere, but the level of internal stability required for that role has not yet had sufficient time to fully take root.

Because a vintner would never take a wine that has not matured and present it as finished. There is a kind of wisdom in that process, an understanding that certain things cannot be accelerated without compromising their integrity. Time is not incidental to the outcome. It is essential to it.

And yet, in subtle but very real ways, we do the equivalent in this field all the time.

We are influenced, whether we recognize it or not, by pressures toward efficiency, toward staffing needs, toward movement and measurable outputs. There is always another client to serve, another need to meet, another demand pressing in. But what we are dealing with in this work is not a product to be managed or moved along. It is a person. And not only the person in treatment, but the person providing the care.

And to those of you who carry the responsibility of building and leading these organizations, I want to speak to you directly for a moment.

What you are doing matters. It takes courage to build something that seeks to help people heal. It takes vision, risk, and perseverance to create and sustain environments where real change can occur. That deserves to be acknowledged, and it deserves respect.

But with that responsibility comes an obligation that runs deeper than operational success.

It is an obligation not only to the outcomes of your clients, but to the welfare, formation, and long-term stability of the people you entrust to care for them. It requires a willingness

to think beyond immediacy, beyond what is convenient or available in the moment, and to consider what is truly required for someone to carry this kind of work well.

There may be times when it costs more to wait. To bring in individuals who have had more time to mature. To invest more intentionally in development rather than simply filling a role. There may be pressure to move more quickly, to meet demand, to keep things running smoothly on the surface.

But these decisions carry weight.

They shape not only outcomes, but people.

This is not about blame. It is about stewardship.

A Word to BHTs

And to my BHT brothers and sisters, I want to say this with the same level of care.

I see you, and I respect you, and I genuinely honor the instinct in you that wants to take what you have been through and turn it into something that serves others. There is something deeply meaningful in that desire, something that reflects courage and compassion and a willingness to step back into difficult spaces not just for yourself, but for the sake of someone else. That is not a small thing. In many ways, it is the beginning of a life that is being reoriented toward something good and life-giving, and it deserves to be acknowledged.

At the same time, I want to encourage you, not in a way that diminishes that desire, but in a way that protects it and strengthens it over the long term, not to rush your own becoming. Because becoming is not something that happens in a moment. It is not secured simply by reaching a certain point in recovery or by stepping into a role where you are now helping others. It is something that unfolds over time, as you continue to do your own work, as you rebuild what has been disrupted, and as you learn to live in a way that is steady and grounded and consistent across the full range of life.

That kind of depth cannot be hurried.

It develops as your recovery moves from something you are holding onto into something that is integrated into who you are. It develops as your values are not only reclaimed, but lived out repeatedly over time. It develops as your identity stabilizes, not around what you have come out of, but around who you are becoming. And it is in that process that something begins to form within you that cannot be manufactured and does not need to be forced.

So give yourself that time. Give yourself the time to age well, to heal deeply, and to consolidate the kind of life you are being called to live, even if that process feels slower than you would like. Let your roots go down further than you think they need to, because it is those deeper roots that will allow you to remain steady when the work becomes difficult,

when the emotions around you intensify, and when the demands of the role begin to press in.

Because the reality is that what you are stepping into is not light work. You are not simply offering encouragement from a distance. You are often sitting with people in the middle of their struggle, absorbing the intensity of their experience, navigating moments of instability, and being asked, in those moments, to remain grounded and present. That requires more than good intention. It requires internal stability that has been formed over time.

And when that work has been allowed to go deep within you, something changes in the way you show up. Your presence becomes more steady. Your responses become less reactive. Your ability to remain grounded in the midst of someone else's chaos becomes more consistent. You find that you are not as easily pulled off center, and that the very things that once might have overwhelmed you can now be met with a kind of quiet strength.

That is where real help begins to take shape.

This work does need you. It needs your story, your empathy, and your willingness to step into places that others might avoid. But it does not simply need your presence. It needs your presence to be rooted in something that has been formed, tested, and strengthened over time.

It needs you well.

And when you allow that process to unfold, when you resist the pull to rush and instead commit to becoming deeply grounded in your own life, you will not have to force your impact. There will be a steadiness about you, a credibility that is felt rather than asserted, a depth that allows others to trust what you carry because it has been lived and integrated.

And that, ultimately, is what this field needs.

Not simply more people willing to help, but people who have taken the time to become the kind of person who can carry this work with depth, steadiness, and integrity over the long haul, people whose lives themselves reflect the kind of healing they are seeking to support in others.

That kind of presence does not come quickly.

But when it does come, it changes lives.